

Cherries need a big cup boost

THERE have been a number of bad experiences for AFC Bournemouth in recent seasons, and one of these was their FA Cup second round exit in their replay with Wycombe Wanderers six years ago.

That 1974-75 campaign was a bad season, all round, for the Cherries. At the end of it they were again relegated to the Fourth Division, for the second time.

But on this occasion it was a "big drop" with a difference. This time they stayed down, the club failing to repeat their feat of the 1970-71 season when they bounced straight back to Division Three at the first attempt.

Now Bournemouth have become embedded in the lower division with only the 1975-76 season — when they figured in the promotion race and finished sixth — to highlight their overall efforts.

That doyen of soccer managers Alec Stock arrived at Dean Court in January last year, following the resignation of John Benson, who is now assistant to another former Bournemouth boss, John Bond, at Manchester City.

Sensational

Incredibly, in their first match under Stock's command, a Bournemouth side who had been desperately short of scoring power slammed seven goals against Doncaster.

It was sensational stuff, but it did not last, and the Cherries — who had already been in difficulties when Stock arrived — finished 18th in the table, their lowest ever placing in the Football League.

Last season they improved to 11th in the final table and, during the close-season David Webb was appointed player-coach.

His pedigree as a player was like that of Stock as a manager — highly impressive. There are few more experienced managerial partnerships in the game.

Stock has had 30 years as a League manager, following his FA Cup giant-killing exploits with Yeovil Town.

He was in charge of Orient, Queen's Park Rangers, Luton and Fulham, besides having a brief spell as manager of Italian club Roma.

He took QPR to a League Cup Final triumph at Wembley, as well as guiding the London club from the Third to the First Divisions in successive seasons.

In 1975 Stock was leading a team out at Wembley again — this time Fulham in the FA Cup Final against West Ham.

David Webb started his League career with Orient, as well. He also played for Southampton, Chelsea, QPR, Leicester City and Derby County before joining Bournemouth to face a new sort of challenge.

Bournemouth profile

Like Stock, the new Bournemouth coach knew nothing about life in the Fourth Division. But Webb has known Cup-winning glory, too. In the FA Cup Final replay against Leeds he scored Chelsea's winning goal.

It is hardly surprising that the achievements of these Bournemouth officials rather overshadow those of their players.

Many of the present squad are relatively inexperienced. Latest recruit from non-League ranks is big centre-half Paul Compton, signed for £10,000 from Southern League club Trowbridge.

Webb, who has been bothered by a back injury, stood down from the side after Compton's arrival. But the newcomer is cup-tied and this will mean a change, perhaps with Webb returning.

Trevor Morgan was signed from Leytonstone and Ilford in September in an effort to add to Bournemouth's attacking strength.

Despite the current success of Steve Massey, there has been a dire shortage of goals. In their first 20 league matches Bournemouth's total was a mere 16.

Defensively Bournemouth have done well, with just the occasional lapse, like the 4-0 defeat at York on the first day of the Fourth Division season and, more recently, a 3-0 crash at Bury.

Kenny Allen, their tall keeper, has attracted other clubs — including West Ham — but Bournemouth's brightest prospect is probably 19-year-old Phil Ferns. He filled the left-back berth at first, but has recently switched to midfield. First Division clubs have been watching his progress.

Injuries

Billy Elliott, Martin McGrath and Nigel Spackman, all young midfield players, have been given their initial experience of Football League action with the Cherries this season.

But injuries have upset the squad. Club captain Phil Holder, still bothered by a pelvic injury which seemed likely to keep him out for the entire season, has just returned to Crystal Palace, his former club, on the coaching side.

Striker Neil Prosser, the former Harlow Town goalgetter, has been restricted to just one first team appearance because of a knee injury.

And Neil Townsend, central defender, is another long-term injury victim, with Achilles tendon trouble.

These have been blows to Bournemouth, whose progress in the Fourth Division this season has been disappointing.

But those old Cup campaigners Alec Stock and David Webb will be looking for a boost in the knock-out competition.